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ABSTRACT

The hypothesis of this paper is that the patterns of political influence on public school systems are changing. Public school systems are subject to so many political influences that one can raise the question, "Who governs?" The educational policy-making procedures seem to have become politicized in the wake of the turbulence of the 1960's. The relationship among school boards, superintendents, and the public in the realm of education is unclear. In order to gather data to test the hypothesis, a longitudinal, comparative research method was devised to include both systematic observation of events and periodic recordings of participants' perceptions. Data were collected for the 1974-75 academic year on the flow of communications and decisions in 11 public school districts in the United States and Canada. Observation of open school board meetings in these districts indicates that among the evident differences are variety in the functions of decision making and communication, distribution and intensity of discussion, the qualitative nature of communication, distribution and intensity and against specific action, and the responsibility for setting the agenda of the meetings. The finding is that, in spite of marked contrast in these and other areas, the superintendent still emerges in each case as the dominant actor. This conclusion implies that further research investigating public communication to the school board and to the superintendent is indicated. Tables, charts, appendices, and footnotes are included in the essay. (Author/DB)

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COMMUNICATION AND DECISION-MAKING IN AMERICAN PUBLIC EDUCATION: A LONGITUDINAL AND COMPARATIVE STUDY

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I

AGAIN, WHO GOVERNS PUBLIC SCHOOLS?

The political influence of technological elites has captured the imagination of social scientists, and for good reason.[1] In a technological age, especially one in which the conservation of scarce resources replaces the distribution of abundant resources as a focus of policy, elected officials are frequently required to deal with issues containing components too sophisticated for them to comprehend. Thus, they turn to experts for information, and the experts' knowledge is easily transformed into a political resource for the acquisition of influence. Recognition of the growing importance of experts has caused social scientists to re-evaluate their empirical and normative models of public policy formation.

Traditional democratic theory holds that political influence follows--and ought to follow--lines of legal authority. The public elects a representative legislative body (congress, city council, school board) to make policy. An executive body, whose senior officials are elected or appointed, is employed to administer policy. Administrators follow the instructions of legislators, who follow the instructions of their constituents. The major source of power is popular electoral support, and the norm of policy decision-making is responsiveness to public desires and preferences. The newer model, what might be called the technological model, sees the implementation of information systems and management science techniques causing a fundamental change in the governing process.[2] Problems and policy alternatives are now too complex for the public and its representatives to evaluate. Legislators solicit and follow the recommendations of professional administrators. The major source of power is information; the new norm of policy decision-making is deference to expertise.[3]

Proponents of the technological model stress the importance of experts as the "new political actors."[4] However, in that portion of the political process concerned with educational policy-making, experts are certainly not new. Although historical interpretations may vary, there is consensus that educational experts, the superintendent and his professional staff, had become influential, if not dominant, actors by the 1920's.[5] The increase in political influence of experts in education pre-dated similar developments in other arenas of decision-making. As a result, a major thrust of the educational policy literature has been to emphasize the uniqueness of educational decision-making. Research has been undertaken with the implicit assumption that education is more vulnerable to expert dominance than are other areas of public policy. Consequently, very few studies have been undertaken which compare decision-making in school districts and other units of local government.[6] In view of the paucity of evidence, we agree with Peterson, who offers the following admonition:

> The literature on school politics may not be fundamentally incorrect in identifying a good deal of autonomy on the part of a small group of educational decision-makers. The central role that superintendents and their staff play in the decision-making process is well documented.....But the explanations and interpretations of this phenomenon depend heavily on the assumption that such influence relationships are peculiar to the field of education. Not only is such an assumption not demonstrated empirically, but it prevents scholars writing on the politics of education from seeing the broader implications of their field.....if decision-making patterns in education are the rule, not the exception, interpretations of American politics need to give greater weight to the role of experts, professionals and the directors of administrative structures than most political scientists generally have.[7]

Ironically, while other social scientists were recognizing the wider applicability of the technological decision-making model employed in the educational policy literature, some researchers were questioning the

continued applicability of that model to educational policy-making. The contention appeared in both popular and academic literature that the increasing politicization of education had changed the climate in which school officials must work to the extent that deference to expertise could no longer be the preponderant form of policy-making.

On the surface, the turbulence of the 1960's certainly seemed to have contributed to a politicization of education. Popular accounts of highly publicized conflicts portrayed professionals as struggling vainly against a variety of powerful interest groups. Professionals themselves were active in promulgating the view of the "beleaguered superintendent."[8] One observer quoted from the ranks of the beleaguered to support his contention that the world of the superintendent, as seen from the inside, is far more conflictual than the world as described by students of educational policy-making:

> The American school superintendent, long the benevolent ruler whose word was law, has become a harried, embattled figure of waning authority.....brow beaten by once subservient boards of education, [teachers' associations], and parents, the superintendent can hardly be blamed if he feels he has lost control of his destiny.....Administrative powerlessness is becoming one of the most pervasive realities of organizational life.[9]

While some might be inclined to dismiss such testimony as self-serving, the view has been to some extent echoed by scholars who argue that the model of professional dominance is no longer correct. Representative of this argument is McCarty and Ramsey's The School Managers.[10] This study of 51 school districts in the Northeast and Midwest led them to conclude:

> One can hardly avoid the view that today's educational administrator is engulfed in a pressure packed set of constraints .....individuals previously without power are rapidly becoming aware of the strength that can be marshalled if they work together.....the tensions so apparent throughout American society have galvanized [school] boards into the political arena with a vengeance.[11]

The upshot of this controversy was a renewed interest in the question "who governs schools?" There was clearly a need for further research into relations between school boards, superintendents, and the public in order to test the hypothesis that patterns of influence were changing.[12] There was also a growing concern that educational policy researchers should make greater use of research techniques employed by other social scientists. Proponents of both the democratic and technological models of educational decision-making had relied almost exclusively on the case study approach. Their studies typically examined a small, unrepresentative sample of school districts and focused on major decisions in those districts. Consequently, they were not replicable and their findings were not generalizable. A study based on a national sample of school districts, systematically selected, which took a comprehensive view of the decision-making process, was a desirable complement to the growing literature subsumed under the rubric "Politics of Education."

The senior author undertook such a project in 1968 and published a portion of the results in 1974.[13] A brief synopsis of the findings indicates that, although the preponderance of evidence supports the view that professionals are the dominant actors, there are systematic variations from this mode of governance.

With regard to community input through interest groups, the conclusions were:

> (1) Most districts do not receive much attention from formal organizations. However, some districts find themselves heavily involved in group politics. High levels of group activity are associated with (a) the size of the district, and (b) the extent of public discontent with educational policy. Larger districts, and districts with declining public support are more likely to experience high levels of interest group activity.
>
> (2) By far the most active groups are those directly linked to the governance structure (e.g., PTA's and teacher groups).

Concerning the distribution of influence between the board and the superintendent, the following conclusions were offered:

(1) In two-thirds of the districts, the superintendent was solely responsible for setting the agenda.

(2) General opposition to the superintendent existed in varying degrees: 17 percent of the boards reported no opposition, 16 percent revealed less than one-fourth of the members in opposition, 32 percent indicated more than one-fourth but less than a majority in opposition, and 35 percent recorded more than half of their members in opposition.

(3) When asked to estimate if school board opposition to a proposal by the superintendent would be "very likely" to result in a defeat of the proposal, in slightly more than half of the boards the majority of members said such a defeat was not very likely.

(4) A major finding was that board opposition to the superintendent and probability of victory are not significantly related, indicating that the factors associated with opposition are probably different from those associated with winning. Indeed, opposition to the superintendent was highest in metropolitan districts but probability of victory was lowest. Opposition was lowest in non-metropolitan districts, but probability of victory highest.

With regard to the interaction of community tension, articulation of community demands, and board constraint upon the superintendent, the findings were:

(1) Community tension leads to opposition but detracts from the probability of board constraint.

(2) The articulation of demands as a consequence of tension results in the same phenomena.

(3) These relationships are not stable throughout all districts, but rather are most pronounced in metropolitan districts. In non-metropolitan areas, tension and consequent demands strengthen the ability of the board to constrain the superintendent. In metropolitan areas, tension and demand articulation strengthens the position of the superintendent. The greater the complexities of the environment, the greater the value placed upon the expertise.

The overall conclusion, given the variations described here, was that superintendents, in spite of the rhetoric, were the dominant actors in educational decision-making, and that their decisions were only occasionally made within a context of community participation through interest groups.

Unfortunately, that study, while enjoying the advantages of generalizability from a national sample, suffered the unavoidable limitations of survey research. Survey data is inevitably removed from reality: surveys tap not events, but perceptions of events. The difficulty is magnified when respondents are asked to summarize many events or to recall events outside the immediate past. The attempt of the 1968 study to describe the functioning of boards of education from the reports of participants faced three interrelated problems of survey research.

The first problem is familiar to all social scientists who employ the observations of participants: quite often their reports do not agree. For example, in the 1968 study there was substantial disagreement between the perceptions of superintendents and school board members on the probable result of board opposition to a policy recommendation from the superintendent. There was consensus in only 45 percent of the sample: 30 percent agreed that the superintendent would prevail, 15 percent agreed that the school board would prevail. In 21 percent the superintendent thought he would lose but the board believed he would win, and in 33 percent the superintendent believed he would win but the board thought he would lose. This lack of congruence between boards' and superintendents' assessment of influence suggests that "the superintendent and school board operate in two different worlds of power, perhaps equally false."[14] Survey data alone cannot resolve the conflict in perceptions.

A second, more basic problem, is that individuals often do not accurately recall and report their own behavior. Burns asked executives in a business organization to keep records of people with whom they talked and what they said.[15] He then asked them what they <u>thought</u> they did. Comparing observation

with interview, Burns found sharp discrepancy between administrators' perceptions of what they were doing and the actual record. The probability of such discrepancy is increased as the period of recall is lengthened. For example, school board members asked to recall the incidence of conflict over an entire school year may base their reports not on the hundreds of decisions made, but on a smaller number of "important" issues. Clearly, individual recall provides an imperfect record of events.

The third problem is that discrepancy between reported and actual behavior is exacerbated when recollections involve interactions with others. Communications research has emphasized that how one views the content of a communication is related to how one views the source of a communication.[16] One's frame of reference significantly affects how one interprets a communication. Burns, for example, often found that when a superior claimed to give a subordinate an "instruction," the subordinate would note that he had been given "advice."[17] Similarly, a school board member's request for information from the superintendent may be variously interpreted as an incident of support, neutrality, or opposition by different observers. These subjective distortions are particularly troublesome if one's intent is to describe patterns of communication and influence.

The dilemma of the 1968 study is apparent. Survey research permits replication and generalization, but it sacrifices depth for breadth. Survey research makes it possible to learn what those who govern perceive as the distributions of influence, but does not indicate the accuracy of those perceptions. Because of these limitations the question "who says what to whom with what effect?" can only be partially answered by survey research.

II

A NEW APPROACH

Our attempt to resolve the problems of past research was to conduct longitudinal comparative research which incorporated both systematic observation of events and periodic recording of participants' perceptions.[18] During the nine month 1974-75 academic year we collected data on the flow of communications and decisions in eleven public school districts in the United States and Canada. Our data set consists of three major elements:

(1) Objective records of all statements and decisions made at central school board meetings, meetings of the superintendent and his administrative cabinet, and other formally constituted media of communication exchange (e.g., regional board meetings, public hearings, etc.), were recorded by two trained observers in each school district.*

(2) School board members, superintendents, and other senior administrators were interviewed regularly to record their perceptions of presentations made by members of the public at meetings and private communications about school policy from members of the public. Those who made presentations at public meetings were interviewed concerning their perceptions of how they had been received by school district officials at the meeting and of any other previous contacts.

(3) An opinion survey on school policy was conducted among

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* All data collection was constrained by precise rules. Observers were trained in the use of various protocols to be used in the recording of observation and interview data. These instruments ensured that information collected and recorded was consistent across districts.

samples of the mass public, interest group leaders, and among the school board and senior administrators in each school district.

Thus, the sample of districts is small, but the amount of information is immense. We have information on unarticulated preferences of the mass public, private and public communications between school district officials and their constituents, and policy decisions made at school board and administrative cabinet meetings. We have both objective and perceptual data relevant to the query "who says what to whom with what effect?"

Our first departure from past research on educational decision-making was to collect data on both events and perceptions over a long period of time. Our second departure was to make the communication the central focus of our study. Social scientists typically concentrate on the behavior modification component of policy-making. Given this interest, the decision or choice quite naturally becomes the unit of analysis. Unfortunately, this approach neglects the fact that much public business is dispatched without any attempt at closure: frequently "the decision" simply does not exist. It is entirely possible that a substantial proportion of the demands placed upon school districts can be satisfied without the modification of behavior or policies or a decision (for example, demands may require no more than the dissemination of readily available information). We believe that to focus exclusively on major decisions can be misleading because it ignores the overwhelming majority of routine public business.

Thus, we attempted as complete a description as possible of the pattern of communications in public school districts. We define communication as a set of premises transmitted from one unit to another. Our foci are: (1) the content of communication, (2) the source of communication, (3) the source of

response, and (4) the content of response.

Given the decision to attempt a comprehensive description of communications, we could only study a limited number of school districts. Our sample is certainly too small to attempt statistical inferences to all school districts. Furthermore, since our method of analysis required a sustained commitment on the part of a school district, we were constrained by access problems. Nevertheless, we attempted to select a sample of districts which would reflect, albeit incompletely, the variety of districts in America. We attempted to include school districts which fell across the range of possible demographic attributes, formal decision rules and informal decision-processes, and expected degree of conflict during the observation period.

In this essay we will attempt a comprehensive description of communications at public school board meetings. From the pattern of communications we will draw some preliminary inferences about patterns of influence among school board members, school district administrators, and members of the public, which will hopefully contribute to an evaluation of the relative status of responsiveness to the public and deference to expertise as norms of decision-making. In order to simplify presentation and to meet space limitations, we have selected three districts, each with appreciably different demographic attributes, preponderant decision-making styles, and levels of conflict, for consideration.

The major demographic differences between the three school districts are portrayed in Table 1. Leeville is located in the Northeast, Barwig Park in the Midwest, and Grahamdale in the Southwest United States. All three are located in Standard Metropolitan Statistical Areas of comparable size which contain at least one sizeable urban area. The Barwig Park and Leeville

districts encompass only part of their SMSAs; the Grahamdale district includes an entire SMSA, and has about three times the enrollment of the other two.

TABLE 1 HERE

Grahamdale is the poorest district, as measured by expenditures per pupil; Barwig Park and Leeville are moderately wealthy school districts by that standard. Finally, Grahamdale has a very heterogeneous school population in terms of minority student enrollments; Barwig Park is slightly over the national average of minority enrollment, while Leeville has a very low minority enrollment.

In terms of formal decision rules, Barwig Park and Grahamdale have traditional lines of authority; the school board appoints the superintendent, and decisions are made formally at central Board of Education meetings. Both districts are financially and structurally independent of the other local government units. In Leeville, the superintendent is appointed by the board, but the mayor serves as chairman of both the school board and the city council. The school district is financially linked to city government: the school budget is part of the city budget. Both regular and capital expenditures must be approved by the city council. As a result, the school board chairman in Leeville is unusually powerful vis-a-vis the superintendent. Our assessment of informal decision-making structures in Barwig Park and Grahamdale was that the superintendent appeared to have wide decision latitude. In Leeville, the superintendent was more constrained by the district's formal relationship to city government and the existence of a powerful opponent. Our preliminary description of the preponderant mode of decision-making was "hierarchical" in Barwig Park and Grahamdale and "bargaining" in Leeville.[19]

TABLE 1

School District Characteristics

	Barwig Park	Leeville	Grahamdale
Enrollment (1974)	25,000	29,000	83,000
Expenditures per Pupil (1974)	$1139	$1217	$838
Pct. Enrollment Below H.S. of Negro and Spanish Heritage (1970)	17.4%	4.3%	43.5%
Pct. Enrollment High School of Negro and Spanish Heritage (1970)	14.4%	2%	39.1%
Approximate Population (SMSA, 1972)	350,000	375,000	360,000

The three districts varied considerably in potential and actual conflict during our period of observation. Grahamdale experienced virtually no conflict. Although there were potential problems, such as an apparent misuse of federal funds which might jeopardize future grants, and dissatisfaction with the district's limited program of native language instruction, no conflict appeared. In Barwig Park, the acting superintendent was named superintendent at the beginning of the academic year. Dissatisfaction was voiced about the method of appointment--no other candidates were brought in for interviews. Potential for conflict also arose in connection with the superintendent's plan for funding of new buildings. He proposed to circumvent a public referendum on a bond issue by seeking necessary taxing authority from an agency of state government. The deliberate avoidance of an election generated some rather articulate demands for more responsive behavior, but not a popular controversy.

Leeville did experience substantial conflict on three issues during the observation period. The first conflict surrounded plans for construction of a new high school. The school had been urging the city council to authorize construction for years without success. Spurred by a threatened loss of accreditation, the city council authorized a bond issue. However, the threat of a reduction in state financial support caused the council to place a moratorium on "unnecessary" construction--including the school. This controversy spilled over into other budgetary matters. The discovery of a deficit in the current operating budget led the mayor to call for elimination of 100 teaching positions. The teachers' union responded that administrative positions should be eliminated. The budget was ultimately reduced without eliminating any positions. Finally, a school board decision to close several small neighborhood schools was met by sustained vocal opposition from parents in the affected areas.

The board reversed its decision and created a citizens' committee to study the problem and make recommendations.

Summarizing these elements, the following schema may be suggested:

CHART 1

	Grahamdale	Barwig Park	Leeville
Size	Large	Medium	Medium
Wealth	Low	Medium	Medium
Heterogeneity	High	Medium	Low
Formal Structure	Traditional	Traditional	Unique
Informal Structure	Hierarchical	Hierarchical	Bargaining
Conflict Potential	Moderate	High	High
Conflict Articulation	Low	Moderate	High

All three school districts hold bi-monthly public school board meetings. The school boards meet as deliberative, decision-making bodies. However, the meetings also serve as media of communication between the school board, school administrators, and members of the public. Information and recommendations are solicited from all three groups in the contexts of both decision-making and communications exchange. In all three districts formal arrangements and informal norms permit all to speak at public school board meetings.

Our descriptive analysis of communications at school board meetings will be organized by the following questions:

(1) What is the agenda of school board meetings?

(2) Who sets the agenda?

(3) Who participates in discussions?

(4) Does participation vary by topic of discussion?

(5) Who proposes policy?

(6) Do boards defer to superintendents' recommendations?

III

WHAT IS THE AGENDA OF SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS?

We define the agenda of school board meetings as the universe of communications which occur at the meetings. Our most basic unit of analysis is the oral statement. Observations in eleven school districts indicate that statements are only partially organized and bounded by the formal parliamentary agenda. The ideal sequence of events, that is, topic introduction, discussion, and resolution rarely occurred. A more typical pattern was topic introduction, discussion on a number of related topics and resolution of some of the issues raised. Thus, our definition leads us to work with data which are more comprehensive but less organized than those found in agenda documents and reconstructed minutes of meetings.[20]

Our procedure was to record the substance of each statement, and to aggregate statements on the same topic at a single meeting into units called discussions. As Table 2 shows, there is considerable variation across districts in the purpose and resolution of discussion. In Barwig Park and Leeville,

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TABLE 2 HERE

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over 90 percent of all discussions are introduced for the purpose of reaching some sort of decision. In Grahamdale, a majority of topics are introduced for the purpose of exchanging information with no decision intended. Of discussions intended for resolution, Grahamdale and Leeville reach some sort of explicit decision (e.g., take action, gather information, table) approximately 90 percent of the time; in Barwig Park approximately one third of these discussions terminate without a clear decision. Thus, the decision-making function dominates board meetings in Barwig Park and Leeville; in Grahamdale,

TABLE 2

Purpose and Resolution of Discussion

	Purpose		
	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Decision Intended	96%	46%	91%
Information-Discussion	4	54	9

	Resolution of Discussions When Decision is Intended		
	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Decision	64%	88%	90%
No Decision	36	12	10

	Means of Resolution		
	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Vote	58%	67%	55%
Consensus	42	33	45

the functions of decision-making and communications exchange are more balanced. In all three districts most discussion on items for decision-making results in an explicit decision. However, in Barwig Park, a sizeable minority of discussions aimed at decisions do not meet that goal.

Finally, there is variation in the means of resolution. In all three districts, a majority of discussions intended for decision are resolved by means of a vote (either by voice or roll-call). A substantial minority, however, are resolved by consensus, (that is, by agreement that no vote is necessary). Consensual decision-making is highest in Barwig Park and Leeville, and lowest in Grahamdale. Thus, Grahamdale displayed the lowest proportion of decision-focused discussion, but also the highest proportion of voting. This is not to imply, of course, that the votes were not, in effect, consensual.

The agenda of school board meetings can also be described in terms of the substance of discussions. Our typology of topics discussed was developed from survey, interview, and observational data collected in eleven school districts, and is summarized in an appendix to this paper. The distribution of discussion units among topics in three school districts is presented in Table 3.

TABLE 3 HERE

In two of the three districts one topic is clearly more frequently discussed: in Barwig Park 30 percent of discussions concerned students, and in Grahamdale 42 percent of discussions centered on district operations. No single topic was so predominant in Leeville. Looking at the frequency of topics across districts, district operations receives greater than average attention in all three districts; and students, curriculum, student services,

TABLE 3

Distribution of Topics Discussed at School Board Meetings

Topic	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Curriculum	19%	10%	3%
Student Services	11	6	16
Students	30	8	8
Parents	2	0	4
Teachers	7	10	10
Administrators	6	3	12
Local Schools	0	5	6
School Board	2	5	10
Finance	7	8	8
Discrimination	0	0	1
Other Government	5	3	5
District Operation	11	42	17

and teachers are particularly important in two of the three districts. It is interesting to note that issues such as busing, affirmative action, and civil rights, are rarely discussed in all three districts--particularly since popular and scholarly literature emphasizes the importance of these issues for school districts. These data suggest that the alleged public and administrative outcry on these topics does not take place at school board meetings.

How similar are the distributions of discussion in the three school districts? Ordinary least squares regressions of the percentages in Table 4 were undertaken to evaluate the null hypothesis that one or more pairs shared the same agenda. The null hypothesis would be supported if coefficients of determination approached 1.0 while slope and intercept terms approached 1.0 and 0 respectively. The results of that analysis summarized in Table 4 indicate that hypothesis of overall agenda similarity should be rejected.

TABLE 4

Pair	Slope	Intercept	R^2
Barwig Park - Grahamdale	.35	5.41	.28
Grahamdale - Leeville	.27	6.10	.60
Barwig Park - Leeville	.09	7.56	.16

It is possible to describe the intensity of discussion across topics by turning attention to the number of statements made on each topic. Table 5 summarizes the distribution of statements among topics.

TABLE 5 HERE

In Barwig Park and Grahamdale the pattern of intensity of discussion is similar

TABLE 5

Distribution of Statements Made at School Board Meetings

Topic	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Curriculum	19%	11%	2%
Student Services	10	5	14
Students	26	11	8
Parents	2	0	3
Teachers	7	11	9
Administrators	4	2	6
Local Schools	0	8	5
School Board	1	6	13
Finance	13	9	21
Discrimination	0	0	0
Other Governments	3	2	4
District Operation	13	36	15

Percentages may not sum to 100 due to rounding.

to the pattern of distribution: the most discussed topics remain students and district operation respectively, and the other topics retain their relative order of magnitude. It is interesting to note that the dispersion of discussions on topics: generally speaking, the most frequently raised topics received fewer statements per discussion.* In Leeville, there is greater dispersion in the distribution of statements than in the distribution of topics.** In terms of intensity, finance in Leeville clearly emerges as the most important topic. While finance accounted for only 8 percent of the topics raised for consideration at board meetings, 21 percent of all statements were addressed to this issue. Student services and district operations are still seen as particularly important topics, but the distribution of statements shows that the school board itself was a topic of intensive discussion, an intensity unequalled in the other districts.

Differences are evident between the dis-ribution of discussion and intensity of discussion by topic in all three districts. An obvious question is: which issues receive disproportionate attention when raised? A simple way of addressing this question would be to compare proportions of discussion and statements presented in Tables 3 and 5 for each topic. This method implies the expectation that each discussion of a topic will consist of the same number of statements. Our data collection experience suggests that another model is more appropriate. When a topic is first discussed there is a certain amount

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* As measured by the following:
Standard deviations: Barwig Park, topics 8.72, statements 8.28;
Grahamdale, topics 11.13, statements 9.64.

** Standard deviations: topics 4.96, statements 6.27.

of expository discussion necessary for purposes of introduction. As the topic is discussed again and again, the number of introductory statements necessary decreases. As a result, a topic which is seldom discussed should receive a greater proportion of statements than its proportion of discussions. Conversely, a topic which is discussed throughout the school year can be expected to contain a smaller proportion of statements than discussions.

Linear regression is a statistical model which is isomorphic with this model of expected intensity of discussion. The independent variable is the proportion of times a topic is discussed and the dependent variable is the proportion of statements made on the topic. The intercept term, which represents the constant cost of introducing a topic, should be positive, and the slope term should be less than one to indicate that fewer statements per discussion occur as a topic is more frequently discussed. As Table 6 indicates, the regression coefficients meet these expectations in all three districts. Furthermore, the level of statistical explanation indicates that the

TABLE 6

	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Intercept	.63	2.47	1.08
Slope	.91	.79	.87
R^2	.90	.91	.48

model is quite accurate for Barwig Park and Grahamdale, and less a-curate, though satisfactory, for Leeville.

The extent of disproportionate discussion is represented by the residual of actual proportion of statements from the prediction of the model. These

residuals are presented in Table 7.

TABLE 7

Disproportionate Intensity of Discussions

	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Curriculum	1.20	1.41	-1.70
Student Services	- .62	-2.22	-1.04
Students	-1.87	3.78	- .06
Parents	-2.26	-2.67	-1.57
Teachers	1.83	5.37	- .80
Administrators	-2.08	-3.63	-5.55
Local Schools	---	2.37	-1.31
School Board	- .45	- .43	3.20
Finance	6.01	.20	12.94
Discrimination	- .89	---	-1.75
Other Governments	-2.17	-3.63	-1.44
District Operation	2.38	- .52	- .91

In each district there is at least one topic whose intensity of discussion differs by more than 5 percent from the model's prediction. "Finance" is overdiscussed in Barwig Park and seriously overdiscussed in Leeville; "Teachers" is overdiscussed in Grahamdale, and "Administrators" is underdiscussed in Leeville. Linear regression of residuals shows that a consistent pattern of over and under discussion does not exist over all three districts.*

* Pairwise R^2's are: Barwig Park - Grahamdale .14; Barwig Park - Leeville .27; and Grahamdale - Leeville .03.

This brief description indicates that the three schools have quite different agendas. There are differences in both the purpose and substance of discussions in the three districts. A slightly different picture of the substance of the agendas results from looking at distributions of discussions and statements among topics. In each district there is variation in intensity of discussion on different topics, and there is no consistent pattern of topics being over and under discussed across districts.

IV

THE NATURE OF COMMUNICATION

Beyond an investigation of topics raised at school board meetings, one should also be concerned with the nature of the discussion. We distinguish between communications characterized as substantive demands for specific action by the school board and simple informational exchanges.

To investigate the qualitative nature of the discussion at school board meetings, we have utilized a four category typology. Statements have been characterized as demands in favor of some action, demands opposed to some action, requests for information, and supplying of information. The total proportion of discrete communications categorized as demands in favor, demands opposed, requests for information, and supplying of information for each of the topic areas are presented in Table 8.

TABLE 8

	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Demand in Favor	16	4	27
Demand Opposed	1	2	10
Request Information	25	18	21
Supply Information	58	76	42

As can be seen from the summary of communications in each of the districts those which are characterized as supplying of information are most prominent. In two of the three districts, Barwig Park and Leeville, the next largest proportions are those which refer to the requesting of information. Interestingly, in Leeville, the second highest proportion of communications are those

characterized as demands in favor. In all three districts, the lowest proportion of discrete communications are those characterized as being demands opposed.

Our interest in the characterization of discrete communications during school board meetings extends beyond simply describing the nature of school board meeting discussion. Instead, both the proportion of total discussion characterized as demands in favor and demands opposed, as well as the relative proportion of demands in favor to demands opposed, are taken as indicators of the amount of conflict in a school district. This approach to the definition of district conflict is based upon the twin assumptions that (1) demands must be present in order to have district conflict and that (2) conflict is a function of competing demands in which some favor and some oppose specific action by the school district.

This conceptualization of school district conflict means that it is not simply the presence of demands that leads to conflict but rather the competition of demands for and against specific action that characterizes conflict. As a result, an investigation of school district conflict over specific topic areas means that one must look at both the total proportion of communications which are categorized as demands for and demands against as well as the relative proportion of demands for and demands against.

TABLE 8a, b, & c
HERE

In terms of district conflict, Grahamdale scores very low in the proportion of total demands for and against specific action. The total number of demands for (4 percent) and demands against (2 percent) as well as the number of demands for and against in specific topic areas are all very low. Even for

TABLE 8a

Nature of Communication by Topic

Leeville

	Curriculum	Student Services	Students	Parents	Teachers	Administrative Cadre	Community Schools	School Board	Finance	Issues	Other Governments	District Operations	
Demand in Favor	2% 36	17% 32	9% 29	3% 21	9% 27	7% 23	4% 24	12% 27	20% 26	0% 40	4% 25	13% 23	100% 27
Demand Opposed	2 13	15 11	7 9	1 4	12 14	4 4	4 9	17 15	23 11	0 0	3 7	11 8	100 10
Request Information	2 20	14 20	8 22	3 15	9 21	6 15	6 25	12 21	20 20	0 0	4 19	17 24	100 21
Supply Information	1 31	13 37	8 41	5 60	8 37	4 21	5 43	10 37	23 44	0 60	5 50	17 46	100 42
	2 100	15 100	8 100	4 100	9 100	6 100	5 100	12 100	21 100	0 100	4 100	15 100	100 100

TABLE 8b

Nature of Communication by Topic

Barwig Park

	Curriculum	Student Services	Students	Parents	Teachers	Administrative Cadre	Community Schools	School Board	Finance	Issues	Other Governments	District Operations	
Demand in Favor	8% 7	6% 10	56% 36	2% 16	4% 9	6% 22	0% 0	3% 38	5% 6	0% 0	3% 13	6% 9	100% 16
Demand Opposed	57 1	14 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	14 5	0 0	0 0	0 0	14 0	100 1
Request Information	23 29	11 27	21 20	1 13	8 28	4 22	0 0	0 10	18 33	0 0	3 21	11 22	100 25
Supply Information	21 63	12 64	20 45	3 71	8 63	4 55	0 0	1 48	13 60	0 100	4 66	14 69	100 58
	19 100	11 100	26 100	2 100	7 100	5 100	0 100	1 100	13 100	0 100	3 100	12 100	100 100

TABLE 8c

Nature of Communication by Topic

Grahamdale

	Curriculum	Student Services	Students	Parents	Teachers	Administrative Cadre	Community Schools	School Board	Finance	Issues	Other Governments	District Operations	
Demand in Favor	15% 6	9% 8	6% 2	0% 0	12% 5	1% 1	1% 0	11% 9	9% 5	0% 0	4% 7	32% 4	100% 4
Demand Opposed	0 0	0 0	3 1	0 0	17 3	0 0	40 9	13 4	0 0	0 0	0 0	27 1	100 2
Request Information	14 24	5 16	7 11	0 0	10 16	3 23	6 14	3 11	13 26	0 0	2 16	36 18	100 18
Supply Information	10 70	5 76	13 86	0 100	11 76	2 76	8 76	5 75	8 69	0 0	2 77	36 77	100 76
	11 100	5 100	11 100	0 100	11 100	2 100	8 100	5 100	9 100	0 100	2 100	36 100	100 100

district operation in which 32 percent of all demands in favor and 27 percent of the demands opposed are found, these demands constitute only 4 percent (demands in favor) and 1 percent (demands opposed) of the total discussion of district operation. This distribution is consistent with the fact that the majority of Grahamdale's meetings are occupied with discussions with no resolution intended. If nothing is to be decided, why make demands?

Of the three districts, Barwig Park is the next least conflictual. While 16 percent of the total number of communications are characterized as being demands in favor of specific action, much less than 1 percent of the communications are characterized as demands opposed to specific action by the district. Of each of the topic areas, "students" receives the greatest proportion of the demands for district action (56 percent) and those demands in favor constitute 36 percent of the total discussion of that topic area. However, there are no demands opposed registered for that topic area and, as a result, school district conflict over the issue of students is judged to be very low. The only topic area that appears to generate any district conflict has to do with the school board where 38 percent of the total communications on this topic are demands in favor and 5 percent are demands opposed to specific district action. However, this topic area constitutes only 1 percent of the total discussions of all topic areas. Therefore, while there may be conflict in the consideration of this topic, this topic accounts for so little of total board discussion that, taken as a whole, Barwig Park must be judged to have very little conflict.

Leeville presents an interesting contrast to both Grahamdale and Barwig Park. In this district, the proportion of demands in favor (27 percent) and demands opposed (10 percent) are relatively high. Unlike the other districts, the proportions of demands in favor and demands opposed are high for <u>all</u> topic

areas. The idea that conflict is a function of both the amount of demands in favor and demands opposed as well as the relative proportion of each is demonstrated well by the example of the discussion of finance during two consecutive board meetings in Leeville occurring in late February and early March. During the discussion of this issue, 56 percent of all demands in favor of specific substantive action on finance (28 percent each meeting) and 58 percent of all demands opposed (29 percent each meeting) were articulated. Thus, conflict tended to be brief and explosive, rather than sustained. Overall, demands in favor vary from a high of 36 percent (curricular) to 21 percent (parents) and demands opposed vary from a high of 15 percent (school board) to a low of 4 percent (parents).

Judged in terms of the twin concerns for total proportion of demands in favor and demands opposed as well as the relative proportion of the one to the other, the topic area curriculum must be judged to be the most conflictual. This issue must be followed closely by student services, teachers, and finance. Parents is the topic area in which the least conflict is noted, but, even at that, the conflict over parents exceeds the conflict in either of the other two districts over any of the other topic areas. One is led to conclude, therefore, that Leeville is the most conflictual of our three districts and that this pattern of high conflict extends across all topic areas.

V

WHO SETS THE AGENDA?

An important question about the governance of any political institution is who sets the agenda. The power to decide what will be discussed is important in both a positive and a negative sense. It is important in a negative sense because it presumably includes the power to decide what will not be discussed. In the absence of discussion, the status quo continues, and policy review, evaluation, and change are impossible. It is important in a positive sense because whoever decides what will be discussed also tends to establish the boundaries and the rules of discussion. The power to limit the topics and policy alternatives which will be entertained gives the controller of the agenda considerable power in determining what policies will be adopted.[21]

We define agenda setting in terms of introducing a topic for discussion. The superintendent is responsible for preparing the parliamentary agenda in almost all school districts, and in many districts responsibility for presenting agenda items is assigned to school board members and/or administrators. Our interest is not with who prepares the agenda document or who makes the introductory statement on a topic, but with who is responsible for the topic's being discussed at the board meeting. This responsibility could usually be established from the discussion of an issue at a meeting or from discussion at earlier recorded meetings. When there was doubt about the originator, the information was considered to be missing. This information was recorded for 62 percent of the discussions in Barwig Park, 87 percent in Grahamdale, and 98% in Leeville.

For this essay, we have divided participants at school board meetings into six general categories: school board members, superintendents, staff

experts, line experts, members of the public, and representatives of other governments. Staff experts are associate superintendents and other cabinet level administrators. Line experts include principals, teachers, lower level administrators and other employees of the school districts. Assignment to a category was made on the basis of the role assumed by the individual during his statement. Individuals could be--and were--assigned to different roles at different times. For example, a principal would be coded as a member of the public when he spoke as a little league coach, and as a line expert when he spoke in his professional capacity.

Before turning to the data, it may be helpful to reiterate that agenda is defined in terms of the communications made at board meetings. Although it is reasonable to expect that superintendents and school board members, as the major actors, will control most of the agendas, it is possible for all actors to introduce agenda items by our definition. Members of the public can "control the agenda" by introducing topics of discussion during the portion of meetings set aside for that purpose, or by introducing a related topic of discussion during a discussion initiated by another actor.

Table 9 summarizes the proportion of discussion initiated by various

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TABLE 9 HERE

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actors in each school district. Barwig Park and Grahamdale show similar patterns, in each district the superintendent introduces nearly three-fourths of all discussions, line experts and members of the public each introduce about 2 percent, and government officials account for virtually none of the discussions. In Barwig Park, the school board controls about 6 percent and staff experts control about 17 percent of introductions, while in Grahamdale,

TABLE 9

Who Sets the Agenda?

	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
School Board	6.3%	10.8%	42.0%
Superintendent	73.3	73.6	35.1
Staff Experts	17.4	12.2	21.4
Line Experts	1.0	2.0	0.0
Public	2.0	1.5	1.5
Government Officials	0.0	0.0	0.0
Total Proportion of Discussions for Which Responsibility Can Be Determined	61.1	87.1	98.1

the figures are 11 and 12 percent.

In Leeville, control of the agenda is much more evenly divided among the school board, superintendent and staff experts. This is largely due to Leeville's decentralized system of setting the parliamentary agenda. In Leeville, the preliminary formal agenda is set by all school officials submitting items for inclusion. In Barwig Park and Grahamdale, the superintendent drafts a preliminary agenda and other actors add to it; in Leeville, the superintendent makes additions to items submitted by other actors. As a result, in Leeville, the school board is the major agenda-setter, following by the superintendent and then staff experts.

Aside from the superintendent, school board members, and major administrative officers of the three school districts, almost no one else places items on the agenda for school board meetings. In each district government officials account for virtually none, the public for about 2 percent, and line officials for zero to 2 percent of the agenda. Experts control a majority of the agenda in all three districts, furthermore, line experts, who have the greatest day to day contact with members of the community, have the least control.

These data clearly support the deference to expertise model. In all three districts the leadership role is assumed by administrators; in Barwig Park and Grahamdale, the school boards rely almost entirely on the superintendent to set the agenda, whereas in Leeville the superintendent shares agenda-setting responsibility with his staff.

VI

WHO PARTICIPATES IN SCHOOL BOARD MEETINGS?

Our definition of participation in school board meetings is also made in terms of communication: a participant is one who speaks at meetings. Once a discussion has been initiated, virtually anyone can speak. In the three school districts considered here, some restrictions are placed on at what point in the discussion a member of the audience can speak and on how long an individual may hold the floor. But, generally speaking, ample opportunity exists for speaking at school board meetings and the general public is actively encouraged to attend and participate.

As was the case with the agenda, it is possible to examine participation in two ways: distribution of participation and intensity of participation. In looking at the distribution of participation, our unit of analysis is the discussion and our query is, In what proportion of all discussion does a given actor speak? Conceivably, a representative of each category could have participated in one hundred percent of the discussions. Table 10 presents participation in discussion for our six types of actors.

TABLE 10 HERE

In all three districts school board members speak in virtually all discussions--not a startling finding. However, there is considerable variation in participation by other actors across the districts. The superintendent makes comments in over half the discussions in Grahamdale and Leeville, but the Barwig Park superintendent participates in only one quarter of the discussions. Staff experts are heavy participants in Grahamdale, making state-

TABLE 10

Participation in Discussions

	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
School Board	98.2%	82.8%	99.1%
Superintendent	25.2	56.8	59.2
Staff Experts	55.4	78.6	33.8
Line Experts	21.2	18.8	29.6
All Administrators	60.4	95.1	77.0
School Establishment	98.2	97.4	90.6
Public	8.1	13.3	39.0
Government Officials	.9	2.3	1.9

ments in over three-fourths of discussions; while staff experts speak 55 percent of the time in Barwig Park and 34 percent of the time in Leeville. There is greater stability of participation by line experts across districts: the participation rate is 19 to 30 percent.

Collapsing the categories superintendent, staff experts, and line experts, a different pattern of participants by administrators emerges in the three districts. In Grahamdale, administrators speak in 95 percent of all discussions, compared to 77 percent in Leeville and 60 percent in Barwig Park. Thus, it appears as though school board meetings can be characterized largely as discussions between school board members and administrators in all three districts. However, in Grahamdale, administrators seem to dominate, while in Barwig Park and Leeville, school board members dominate.

Turning to participation by those outside of the school district establishment, it appears that government officials are infrequent participants in all three school districts. In Leeville, members of the public participate in 39 percent of all discussions. The figures are 13 and 8 percent for Grahamdale and Barwig Park, respectively. The residents of Leeville were clearly more active in presenting their views directly at school board meetings. When one considers that the vast majority of discussions at school board meetings concern routine housekeeping matters, the participation rates on the order of 10 percent in Barwig Park and Grahamdale are not unimpressive.

In looking at intensity of participation our unit of analysis is the statement and our query is, "What proportion of all statements do actors of a given category make?" Table 11 presents the distribution of statements among types of actors for the three school districts. When participation is viewed in this way, the difference in school board patterns is accentuated.

TABLE 11 HERE

In Barwig Park and Leeville, school board members account for 50 percent of all statements. In Grahamdale, board member make 9 percent of all statements. The Grahamdale board is apparently doing more listening than speaking; it appears as though it is listening to the superintendent. The Grahamdale superintendent makes 46 percent of all statements. His colleagues in Barwig Park and Leeville make 9 and 15 percent of statements in their respective districts. Administrators in Grahamdale account for 84 percent of all statements at school board meetings while their counterparts in Barwig Park and Leeville make substantially less than half of all statements. If control of the fllor is synonymous with control of decision-making, deference to expertise is unquestionably the keynote in Grahamdale.

In Barwig Park and Leeville, school board members make the majority of statements, and administrators account for about 40 and 30 percent of all statements. In Barwig Park the superintendent lets his staff and line people carry the burden of administrative comment; in Leeville, administrative comment is evenly divided between the superintendent and other officers. These data suggest a typology of differences in division of labor among administrators in the three districts: superintendent dominates (Grahamdale), burden is shared (Leeville), staff and line administrators carry most of the burden (Barwig Park).*

The pattern of intensity of participation of actors outside the school

* Of course, we refer only to the labor of speaking at board meetings.

TABLE 11

Intensity of Participation

	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
School Board	58.3%	9.2%	57.5%
Superintendent	8.7	45.7	14.5
Staff Experts	22.4	29.4	7.8
Line Experts	8.5	8.4	6.2
Public	2.0	6.4	13.6
Government Officials	.3	1.1	.5

establishment is essentially the same as their pattern of distribution of participation in the three school districts. Government officials account for one percent or less of statements made. Intensity of public participation is greatest in Leeville (14 percent), followed by Grahamdale (6 percent), and Barwig Park (2 percent). The public is heard at school board meetings in all three districts, but, at least in Barwig Park and Grahamdale, the public voice overall is not very loud. Perhaps members of the public--and other actors--concentrate their communications resources on a limited number of topics and, thus, increase their influence. A logical extension of the question, "Who participates?", is an investigation of the pattern of participation across different substantive areas.

Again, there are two queries: "Do actors specialize in certain topics?", and, "Are topics dominated by different actors?" Table 12 presents data relevant to both questions. The upper number in each cell is the row percentage (distribution of actors' statements among topics); and the lower number is the column percentage (distribution of statements on a topic among actors).

TABLE 12 a, b & c HERE

Looking first at the proportion of statements on each topic accounted for by specific actors, we find that the actors who were most important overall were also most important on each topic. In Barwig Park and Leeville, school board members are the modal speakers on all topics. In Grahamdale, the superintendent is the modal participant on all topics except local schools, where staff experts make an equal proportion of statements.

Generally speaking, actors' proportion of statements on individual topics

TABLE 12a

Statements by Source and Topic

Barwig Park

	Curriculum	Student Services	Students	Parents	Teachers	Administrators	Local Community	School Board	Financial	Discrimination	Other Services	District Organization
School Board	15% 45	10% 54	30% 69	2% 58	7% 59	6% 74	0% 0	2% 71	12% 52	0% 0	4% 71	13% 58
Superintendent	19 9	11 9	22 8	3 11	10 12	2 4	0 0	1 4	19 13	0 0	2 6	11 7
Staff Experts	23 26	16 34	22 10	2 20	8 24	4 21	0 0	0 4	12 20	0 0	2 15	12 21
Line Experts	40 18	4 3	13 4	2 9	1 1	1 1	0 0	0 0	26 16	0 0	1 3	13 9
Public	23 2	3 1	10 1	3 2	13 4	0 0	0 0	13 21	0 0	5 1.00	0 0	31 5
Gov't. Officials	40 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	60 5	0 0

TABLE 12b

Statements by Source and Topic

Leeville

	Curriculum	Student Services	Students	Parents	Teachers	Administrators	Local Community	School Board	Financial	Discrimination	Other Services	District Organization
School Board	2% 59	14% 56	8% 52	3% 52	10% 64	6% 66	5% 61	15% 66	18% 49	0% 0	4% 57	15% 59
Super-intendent	2 20	9 9	10 17	4 18	9 16	7 19	7 18	9 11	23 16	0 0	3 12	16 16
Staff Experts	0 2	16 9	14 13	2 4	5 4	6 8	1 2	13 8	15 1	0 0	7 14	20 11
Line Experts	3 14	29 13	9 7	8 14	5 4	2 3	12 14	9 4	11 0	0 0	3 5	10 4
Public	1 5	14 13	7 11	3 12	8 12	2 5	2 4	10 10	41 26	0 0	1 5	12 11
Gov't. Officials	0 0	15 1	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	8 0	0 0	0 0	69 8	8 0

TABLE 12c

Statements by Source and Topic

Grahamdale

	Curriculum	Student Services	Students	Parents	Teachers	Administrators	Local Community	School Board	Financial	Discrimination	Other Services	District Organization
School Board	14% 12	8% 15	10% 9	0% 0	15% 13	4% 17	4% 5	6% 11	9% 10	0% 0	3% 14	24% 6
Superintendent	10 43	5 43	9 38	0 0	12 51	2 47	6 35	7 58	9 45	0 0	3 57	37 47
Staff Experts	3 9	3 17	13 34	0 0	10 27	3 36	9 35	3 15	9 31	0 0	1 19	45 37
Line Experts	34 26	11 17	14 11	0 0	9 7	0 0	0 0	1 2	13 13	0 0	0 1	17 4
Public	16 10	3 4	13 7	0 0	6 3	0 0	26 21	12 14	1 1	0 0	3 9	20 4
Gov't. Officials	0 0	18 4	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	29 4	0 0	0 0	0 0	0 0	53 2

reflect their proportion of statements on all topics. There are, however, some interesting exceptions. In Barwig Park, both line experts and members of the public contribute a disproportionately large part of the statements on finance. In Grahamdale, line experts' statements on curriculum and public statements on local schools are disproportionately large. In Leeville, the public's proportion of statements on finance is substantially larger than their proportion of statements overall.

Turning to the question of the distribution of statements by actors across topics, we find that, although the topic which receives the greatest attention from the superintendent and school board varies across districts, within each district the superintendent and school board members direct their greatest attention to the same topic. The issue area most discussed by both superintendent and school board members is students in Barwig Park, district operation in Grahamdale, and finance in Leeville. In Barwig Park and Grahamville, staff experts share the emphasis of their superintendent and school board; in Leeville, finance is the second most discussed topic by staff experts.

While the school board, superintendent, and staff experts are involved in the discussion of almost all issues, generally speaking, other actors are much more selective and issue specific in their participation. These latter groups tend to concentrate on a small number of topics. In Barwig Park, line experts concentrate on curriculum and finance, the public concentrates on curriculum and district operation, and government officials concentrate on curriculum and other services. In Grahamdale, government officials and the public join the school board and top administrators in concentrating on district organization. The public also concentrates its comments on local schools, and line experts focus on curriculum. In Leeville, the public follows the lead of

senior officials by concentrating on finance, line experts focus on student services, and government officials concentrate on other services.

In summary, actors which dominate discussion overall also tend to dominate discussion on each topic. Line experts, members of the public, and government officials focus on a small number of topics, but there is little common focus of types of actors across districts. Rather, these actors' foci coincide with those of their school board and top administrators.

VII

WHO PROPOSES POLICY DECISIONS?

After the agenda has been set and discussion has been completed, some sort of decision is in order. We now turn to the question, "Who makes policy proposals at school board meetings?" Our unit of analysis is the discussion, and we will be focusing on how discussions in which decisions are intended are resolved. This question differs from that of agenda setting because the person who initiates discussion may or may not make a policy proposal. We define a proposer as the first person who articulates a proposal which is decided upon--favorably or negatively--by the school board.* The distribution of proposals among our six types of actors is summarized in Table 13.

TABLE 13 HERE

The pattern of proposals reflects the patterns of agenda setting and discussion in the three school districts. In Grahamdale, the superintendent makes most policy proposals, while school board members make most proposals in Barwig Park and Leeville. Looking at the distribution of proposals among administrators, we see that line experts make virtually no proposals in Barwig Park and Grahamdale, and about 1 percent of the proposals in Leeville. The Grahamdale superintendent carries the burden of administrative proposal-making, while staff experts out-propose the Barwig Park superintendent, and staff experts more evenly share proposal making with the superintendent.

In Barwig Park and Grahamdale, only school officials made policy proposals

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* Refer to Table 2, (in the section on agenda), for how discussions are resolved.

TABLE 13

Who Makes Policy Proposals?

	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
School Board	90.0%	35.0%	77.0%
Superintendent	.6	57.0	11.0
Staff Experts	8.5	8.5	4.0
Line Experts	0.0	0.0	1.2
Public	0.0	0.0	5.9
Government Officials	0.0	0.0	.8

at school board meetings. In Leeville, non-school officials made about 7 percent of all propcsals. Thus, in all three districts, members of the public attend meetings and voice opinions, but, in two of the three districts, they defer to elected and professional school officials the responsibility of proposing policy. In the third district, school officials make 93 percent of proposals. It is tempting to infer that the role that those outside the school district establishment play at school board meetings is that of spectator, rather than participant.

VIII

DECISIONS

The final subject of this survey of communications at school board meetings is decisions. Our units of analysis are decisions reached by voting. As noted above, in all districts a majority of decisions are reached by means of a vote. The subset of decisions reached by votes is not a random sample of all decisions, but it probably contains the most important decisions made by the school board. Some votes are required by statute, some votes are taken to record, more officially, the policy of a school board, and some votes are due to conflict and a desire to articulate dissent. Our analysis of voting behavior will focus on two familiar topics from the literature of educational policy-making: the extent of conflict and consensus within the school board, and the extent to which the school board relies upon the superintendent in its policy decisions. The results are summarized in Table 14.

TABLE 14 HERE

During our observation period 159 votes were takne in Barwig Park, 170 in Grahamdale, and 176 in Leeville. Unanimous voting is the rule in all three school district: 97 percent unanimous in Barwig Park, 99 percent in Grahamdale, and 89 percent in Leeville. The low incidence of conflict makes an analysis of voting blocs within each school board unwarranted.

The voting behavior of school board members was quite easily observed and recorded. The assessment of the superintendent's position was a somewhat more difficult task. The superintendent's position was recorded on the basis of his explicit policy recommendations, expressions of support or opposition during discussions at school board meetings, and statements made at

TABLE 14

Voting Behavior

	Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
Total Votes	159	170	176
Unanimous Votes	154	168	157
Superintendent's Position Known	132	140	91
Superintendent's Position Adopted	132	140	87

administrative cabinet meetings prior to school board meetings. If there was doubt about a superintendent's position, the information was considered to be missing.

The superintendents in Barwig Park and Leeville made their policy preferences known to their school boards over 80 percent of the time; the Leeville superintendent stated a position on 52 percent of the votes. The pattern of school board adoption of superintendent recommendations is striking: 96 percent of the Leeville superintendent's preferences were enacted, and 100 percent of the preferences of the Barwig Park and Grahamdale superintendents were enacted. A total of four votes in Leeville were "lost" by the superintendent. Despite varying degrees of conflict, public participation, administrative control of agenda and discussion in the districts all three superintendents enjoy the support of their school boards when they make policy proposals. Regardless of how responsive school board members are to their constituents in the public, they are undeniably responsive to their senior expert, the superintendent.

IX

CONCLUSIONS

In order to facilitate the assimilation of the information presented in the body of the essay, a brief outline may prove helpful.

CHART 2 HERE

Barwig Park emerges as a district striving to contain conflict, to achieve consensus. The superintendent, new to the job, keeps a low profile. There is potential for conflict, but it does not achieve articulation. In keeping with his low key approach, the superintendent sets the agenda, but allows his staff to do more discussing and proposal making. The board also plays a major role here. However, the superintendent, while content to share authority with the staff, sets the agenda, makes his position known, and wins. Public input is apparently not a significant aspect of the process.

Grahamdale is a more classic picture of superintendent dominance, and adherence to the administrative ideology of unity. Conflict is very low, and meetings serve largely as a forum for information exchange. The superintendent dominates the board in agenda setting and discussion. He also appears to dominate his own administrative staff. He makes a majority of the proposals, takes a position in almost all cases, and always wins. Public input, while incrementally higher than that of Barwig Park, is not appreciable.

In contrast to these districts, Leeville is substantially more complicated. Two powerful antagonists, the mayor and the superintendent, engage in protracted disputes. Although we can hardly do more than speculate, it appears that the interdependence of city and school district governance is

CHART 2

Summary of Results

		Barwig Park	Grahamdale	Leeville
1.	Purpose of Agenda	Decision	Information/Decision	Decision
2.	Content of Agenda	(1) Students, (2) Curriculum, (3) Finance, (4) District Operation, (5)Student Services	(1) District Operation, (2) Curriculum, (3) Students, (4) Teachers.	(1) Finance, (2) District Operations, (3) Student Services, (4) School Board.
3.	Level of Conflict	Controlled	Low	High
4.	Agenda Setting	Superintendent	Superintendent	Board/Administration
5.	Participation in Discussion	Board active, administrative staff more active than superintendent. Public passive.	Superintendent and staff active. Board passive. Public participation low to moderate.	Board active, superintendent and staff divide responsibility. Public participation relatively high.
6.	Proposals for Action	Board dominant	Superintendent dominant	Board dominant
7.	Votes	Superintendent usually takes a policy position and wins.	Superintendent usually takes a policy position and wins.	Superintendent less likely to take policy position, but wins when he does so.

crucial to the maintenance of such a bargaining process. To the extent that Leeville is "unreformed" (that is, not insulated from "normal" political processes), the ideology of the reform movement is empirically supported. The key to the conflictual nature of meetings, the relatively active board, and the higher involvement of the public may be the emergence of a legitimate challenge to the authority of the superintendent from within the elite strata of the community. The challenge to the authority of the superintendent may have a ripple effect, encouraging the board and certain portions of the public to become active. However, even with such a challenge, the superintendent still achieves success when he takes a position. His reluctance, in contrast to other superintendents, to state a position may be a consequence of his assessment of the probability of defeat. It is equally plausible to speculate that, in the presence of conflict, "expert" opinion is harder to justify. Also, since, unlike our other districts, the board is active in agenda-setting, the superintendent may not be able or expected to develop and present a recommendation. In any case, influence, although formidable, is not unchallenged.

Despite varieties in participation, the superintendent clearly emerges as the dominant actor. To this extent, the observational data and the survey data from the 1968 study are in agreement. It should be kept in mind that this essay is limited to public board meetings. The public may elect to communicate in other ways, either to the school board or to the superintendent. If this is true (and we will present evidence on this subject in the future), several possibilities occur. First, given the key role of the superintendent, it is possible that he, rather than the board, "represents" the active public. Preliminary analyses of our survey data do not support this assertion, but the findings are quite tentative. Even if representation by administrators is established,

one wonders what range of opinion the superintendent represents. Is such representation an adequate alternative to a board reflecting constituent demands? This essay suggests that boards serve this function poorly, and that the technological model of decision-making is characteristic of education.

APPENDIX 1

Topic Categories

1. Curriculum includes: general education programs; basic skills; vocational education; bilingual education; sex education; topical education.

2. Student Services includes: athletics; guidance, counseling; special extra programs; programs for special students; transportation; food, health services; and safety programs.

3. Students includes: student values; student performance; student misbehavior; student records; enrollment, attendance.

4. Parents includes: parental responsibilities; parent-teacher conferences; parental participation in decision-making; and relations with teachers.

5. Teachers includes: teacher values; teacher performance; teacher-staff unions; and teacher support staff.

6. Administrators includes: principals; staff administrators; consultants; superintendent; administrative reports, research; and administrative professional activities.

7. Local Schools includes: alternative schools; community schools; and other innovative schools, methods.

8. School Board includes: school board evaluation; appointment, election of board members; board behavior.

9. Finance includes: appropriations, revenues; and bond issue.

10. Discrimination includes: equality; busing; affirmative action.

11. Other Government includes: activities of federal government, state government, county government, municipal government, and other educational institutions.

12. District Operation includes: maintenance; facilities; and materials.

FOOTNOTES

1. See, for example, Robert L. Heilbroner, An Inquiry Into the Human Prospect (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., Inc., 1974) and Victor L. Ferkiss, The Future of Technological Civilization (New York: Goerge Braziller, 1974).

2. The contradiction between concurrent demands for direct control of leaders on the one hand, and for increasing government initiative on policy development on the other is well noted in Henry Jacoby, The Bureaucratization of the World (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

3. Don K. Price, "Knowledge and Power," in Paul J. Piccard, ed., Science and Policy Issues (Itasca, Ill.: F. E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1969). See also Guy Benveniste, The Politics of Expertise (Berkeley: Glendessary Press, 1972).

4. Allan W. Lerner, Experts, Politicians, and Decisionmaking in the Technological Society (General Learning Press, forthcoming).

5. David Tyack, The One Best System (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 126-176. See also James W. Guthrie, et al, "The Erosion of Lay Control," in National Commission for Citizens in Education, Public Testimony on Public Schools (Berkeley: McCutchan Publishing Co., 1975), pp. 92-101.

6. R. J. Snow, Local Experts: Their Roles as Conflict Managers in Municipal and Educational Government (Ph.D. dissertation, Northwestern University, 1966) and Roland L. Warren, et al, The Structure of Urban Reform (Lexington, Mass: D. C. Heath, 1974), are examples of such efforts.

7. Paul E. Peterson, "The Politics of American Education," in Fred N. Kerlinger, ed., Review of Research in Education (Itasca, Ill.: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1974), p. 365.

8. This apt phrase is found in William Boyd, "The Public, The Professionals, and Educational Policy-Making: Who Governs?" (Paper presented at the American Educational Research Association Annual Meeting, Washington, D.C., 1975), p. 7.

9. Gene I. Maeroff, "Harried School Leaders See Their Role Waning," New York Times, March 5, 1974, pp. 1, 29; Donald A. Erickson, "Moral Dilemmas of Administrative Powerlessness," Administrators' Notebook, April, 1972, pp. 3-4, cited in Boyd, op cit, p. 8.

10. Donald J. McCarty and Charles E. Ramsey, The School Managers (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Co., 1971).

11. Ibid., pp. 153, 211 & 213.

12. It should be noted that most of the proponents of the beleaguered superintendent position viewed threats to expertise as originating from outside the local community (court decisions, administrative regulations, etc.), or from the increasing organizational efforts of teachers.

13. L. Harmon Zeigler, and M. Kent Jennings, with G. Wayne Peak, Governing American Schools (North Scituate, Mass.: Duxbury Press, 1974).

14. Michael O. Boss, "The School Superintendent: Politician or Manager," (unpublished manuscript). Michael Boss died on December 21, 1975, leaving an incomplete, but brilliant, analysis of these data. Boss' analysis followed our scheme of examining boards as units rather than by working with individual data. It is instructive, however, to note that 79 percent of the superintendents, as compared to 54 percent of the board members, estimated the probability of superintendent victory as very or fairly likely.

15. Tom Burns, "The Direction of Activity and Communication in a Departmental Executive Groups: A Quantitative Study in a British Engineering Factory with a Self-Recording Technique," Human Relations (1954), pp. 73-87.

16. See, for example, Carl I. Havland, et al, Communication and Persuasion (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1953), pp. 35-36.

17. Burns, op cit, p. 76.

18. Our methodology was heavily influenced by Benjamin Walter, Bureaucratic Communications: A Statistic of Analysis of Influence (University of North Carolina, Institute for Research in Social Science, Sept. 1, 1963) and David Kovenock, "Influence in the U.S. House of Representatives: A Statistical Analysis of Communications," (Unpublished manuscript, 1967).

19. Our classification is taken from Robert A. Dahl and Charles E. Lindblom, Politics, Economics and Welfare (New York: Harper and Row, 1953). Briefly, a hierarchical process of organization is one in which leaders exercise a very high degree of unilateral control whereas bargaining is a form of reciprocal control among leaders.

20. Eugene R. Smoley, Community Participation in Urban School Government (Washington, D.C.: USOE Cooperative Research Project S-029, 1965), which used written records to reconstruct events at board meetings.

21. As E. E. Schattschneider argues: "Whoever decides what the game is about also decides who can get into the game." The Semi-Sovereign People (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1960), p. 105.